

# To Look To The Future

## We Need To Remember The Past



*By Janice Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Parent to Parent of New York State*

As every parent knows, new babies do not come with a “how to” manual.

When we enter the “disability world” of parenting a child with special needs, an entire new manual is needed. It is needed to be a “how to navigate multiple systems” manual. Doctors, benefits, insurance, specialists, therapists, evaluations, and the list goes on.

As my son enters his late teens, I am starting to turn the page of the manual to a new chapter. It creates as many questions and as many fears as the first day he went to a preschool or to elementary school. Will he work? Will he continue to live with us? Will his education continue? Who will he live with?

If anyone had asked me a dozen or so years ago if I could picture my son living on his own or owning his own home, I would have said “no way”. I don’t feel that way anymore. There are resources available to help with home ownership and there are

home-based support services that could help with his independent lifestyle if he so chooses.

Our children with disabilities are growing up with an independence that was not available or supported or even thought of a generation ago. A generation ago parents were fighting for a public school education for their child with disabilities. Parents were fighting for an alternative to an institutional placement. Two decades ago Early Intervention was not an available service for babies.

It is important for all of us to remember that what we have today for our children was not always there. It is easy to be complacent. Complacency can be very dangerous. What we have today is because of the dedication and love and hard work of parents from the generations before us. We need to hear their stories, remember their stories and be forever grateful for their hard work.

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Parent to Parent of New York State is a nonprofit organization that connects and supports families of individuals with special needs. For more information, please visit our website at [www.parenttoparentnys.org](http://www.parenttoparentnys.org) or call 1-800-305-8817.